



Committee: Judicial Proceedings
Testimony: SB0422 – Juvenile Court – Jurisdiction
Organization: Jewish Community Relations Council of Howard County, MD
Submitting: Laura Salganik, Chair
Position: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS
Hearing Date: February 4, 2025

Dear Chair Smith and Committee Members:

The Jewish Community Relations Council is submitting this testimony in favor of SB0422 with amendments. We favor ending the practice of automatically charging youth as adults, and we believe the bill should be amended to end the practice for all youth including those who are 16- and 17-years old.

Maryland sends more young people to adult court based on offense types than any other state per capital except Alabama. A major reason is that Maryland requires that some 14 and 15 year olds and most 16 and 17 year olds be automatically prosecuted in adult court for 33 offenses, putting us out of step with other states.

It may seem like youth who are accused of very serious crimes should be subject to the type of consequences that are designed for adults. However, as a strategy for deterring future criminal behavior, it is ineffective. It has been demonstrated that youth who are charged as adults have a higher recidivism rate when completing their sentences than those charged as juveniles for similar acts.

Similarly, charging juveniles as adults exacerbates racial inequities that begin with how young children are treated when they first enter school. In Maryland, 81 percent of juveniles charged in adult courts are Black. And studies have shown that Blacks receive harsher sentences than Whites for the same acts.

As Jews, we are taught to pursue justice of all kinds. We do not believe the current system of automatic charging of youth as adults is just. It is high time to change it. We urge the committee to give a favorable report with the amendments discussed above to this important legislation.